

Misc. I.S. School
VOLKOV Academy
Vicinity of Nevski Prospekt

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The Volkov Academy, the chief Soviet espionage school, is located in Leningrad on a narrow side street near Nevskiy Prospekt. The building is in no way marked as an official installation; but those wishing to enter are stopped by four men in civilian clothes and must identify themselves. The doors are operated automatically.

Small windowless rooms illuminated by indirect lighting resemble prison cells; each cell contains five to ten seats and two small desks. Over the door is a loud-speaker, and in front of the principal wall is a microphone. These are the classrooms. Lectures on cryptography, chemistry, political economy, languages, and weapons are presented through the loud-speaker by invisible teachers. The student has to step in front of the microphone and answer his question, but he will never find out whether he gave the correct answer.

The espionage academy of Leningrad, officially known as the Academy of Information, was founded in 1943 when the numerous intelligence schools scattered throughout the Soviet Union had proved to be insufficient. It trains agents who will get a specific assignment abroad after a 2-year course, as well as personnel who will be assigned to army units.

The master of this building, to which only men are admitted, is a gloomy-looking man of approximately 50 years of age, known as Comrade Volkov. Although the academy bears his name, his own identity remains a riddle over which the sharpest minds in world espionage have brooded in vain. According to one version, he is an Austrian Communist named Hoerschbeck, who has been living in the Soviet Union since 1934. Another hypothesis designates him as a onetime Spanish major. Others claim to recognize in him a onetime comrade in arms of Marshal Tito.

Actually Comrade Volkov is typical of those peculiar Soviet animated thought and will machines whose very uniformity makes "name and type" a matter of indifference. He speaks Russian, German, English, Spanish, Serbian, and French, but all with a limited vocabulary. No one has ever seen him with a woman or even with a personnel friend. In "his" academy he lives in a room which is not different from the classrooms, except that it has a camp bed. He makes no service trips to Moscow; his superiors, who are directly under Beriya and Stalin, come to Leningrad when they wish to speak to him personally.

Volkov requires of his teachers and students the same "superhuman" attitude which he himself adopts. No member is permitted to learn the identity of another; no personal friendship may be formed, nor may students enter into any correspondence during the training period. Private conversations are forbidden, and are, in fact, rendered impossible by the presence of listening devices in all rooms and corridors.

The class hours are officially from 0800 to 1200 and from 1400 to 1800 hours. However, students are repeatedly aroused at night by telephone calls summoning them to the academy, where difficult problems are submitted to them at the most improbable hours.

Course No 1 is the study of foreign languages and customs. Special emphasis is placed on accent. Students do not learn merely a language, such as French, but regional dialects, such as Provencal, Breton, and Norman. They are taught how an American opens his pack of chewing gum, how an Englishman leans against the counter of his "pub," and how the people of the Rhineland behave while bowling.

Next in importance to linguistics, in which each student naturally specializes, are topography and cartography. Upon completion of 6 months' training in these fields, a student of the Volkov Academy must be able to draw a map of a region merely from a review of a complete series of picture postcards. A knowledge of photographic technique is similarly acquired. On trips in the vicinity of Leningrad, students are confronted with complicated photographic and topographic problems.

An entire quarter of the total training period is devoted to weapons training. Models of the latest US submachine guns are demonstrated. Types of planes are discussed in the most minute mechanical detail. Explosives are chemically analyzed. In addition, the curriculum includes a very detailed study of the organization of foreign armies and of foreign insignia.

The only relatively "human" element, is a short course entitled "Love as an enemy of the intelligence agent," comic films are projected to illustrate the misadventures of agents who were led astray from the path of duty by beautiful women. Authentic data on espionage officers of both world wars to whose careers love proved fatal are shown.

One fifth of the training period is devoted to general theoretical subjects: an outline of modern atomic physics, political history, economics, and folklore. Subsequently, the students are sent to a similar school in Moscow for instruction in commando tactics, such as parachute jumping, automobile driving, airplane piloting, jujitsu, and prison breaking.

A significant peculiarity of the school is the discouraging of lecture notes by students, as far as possible. The classification of a student on the occasion of his examinations is made on the basis of the amount of notes he has taken during the courses. Almost superhuman memories are required of the students. The Volkov Academy is the most strenuous training institutions in the world. Its discipline is stricter than that of the Frunze Academy (Soviet military school).